

Ms. WOOLSEY. Mr. Speaker, while the House was out of session last week, the Nation suffered its 2,000th fatality in the conflict known as Operation Enduring Freedom, the overwhelming number of those deaths coming in Afghanistan. For more than 10 years now, we've been losing young, courageous servicemembers on a mission that isn't bolstering our national security, isn't supported by the American people, but is costing us billions of dollars every month. What a disaster and what a tragedy.

Mr. Speaker, from this Chamber, I regularly hear Members of the majority invoking morality in support of efforts to cut effective programs that help the most vulnerable members of our society. So where is their moral outrage and where is their budget axe when it comes to the most expensive government program imaginable that has killed 2,000 of our troops?

Two of those 2,000 come from my part of the country, the Sixth Congressional District of California. Army Specialist Christopher Gathercole and Army Sergeant Ryan Connolly, both of Santa Rosa, California, were killed less than a month apart in the year 2008.

We had others who were killed during the nearly 9 years that our troops were in Iraq, but 2,000 deaths doesn't even begin to tell the story of the human cost of this war. More than 15,000 Americans have come home wounded, many in ways that will alter their lives forever. Even those who returned with their bodies intact often suffer from devastating posttraumatic stress that may never go away. Postdeployment suicide has reached epidemic levels.

Nearly 2.5 million men and women have served in Afghanistan and Iraq, and I actually can't say that I trust that the veterans health care system is prepared or will be prepared to deal with the huge demand that will be placed on the services in the coming years.

A recent report prepared by VA doctors outlines the unique and varied health care needs of returning Iraq and Afghanistan veterans. In addition to traumatic brain injuries, depression, and substance abuse, there's chronic muscle pain, sleep disturbances, hypertension, and complications from environmental exposures. Many of our returning heroes have difficulty readjusting to civilian life, integrating once again into their families, their workplaces, and their communities.

We had better be willing as a Nation to write that check for their care as we were for the war that damaged them in the first place.

And it's critical, Mr. Speaker, that we remember the human cost is not just here in the United States. Two thousand Americans have died in nearly 11 years of war. Well, 3,000 Afghan civilians, many of them children, were killed last year alone for the cause of their so-called liberation.

It's not enough to acknowledge the casualties of this war, to memorialize

the dead and pay tribute to their service. What we need is an immediate change of policy. To extend the war through 2014 is to sentence hundreds more servicemembers to their deaths, all for a policy that isn't achieving its stated objectives while strengthening the very terrorists and extremists that we're trying to defeat.

There's only one solution, Mr. Speaker. There's only one choice that will finally keep the death toll from climbing. That choice is bring our troops home. Bring them home now.

#### WHEN WILL WE ATTACK SYRIA?

The SPEAKER pro tempore. The Chair recognizes the gentleman from Texas (Mr. PAUL) for 5 minutes.

Mr. PAUL. Plans, rumors, and war propaganda for attacking Syria and deposing Assad have been around for many months. This past week, however, it was reported that the Pentagon indeed was finalizing plans to do just that.

In my opinion, all the evidence to justify this attack is bogus. It is no more credible than the pretext given for the 2003 invasion of Iraq or for the 2011 attack on Libya.

The total waste of those wars should cause us to pause before this all-out effort at occupation and regime change is initiated against Syria. There are no national security concerns that require such a foolish escalation of violence in the Middle East. There should be no doubt that our security interests are best served by completely staying out of the internal strife now raging in Syria. We are already too much involved in supporting the forces within Syria anxious to overthrow their current government. Without outside interference, the strife, now characterized as a civil war, would likely be non-existent.

Whether or not we attack yet another country, occupying it and setting up another regime that we hope we can control, poses a serious constitutional question: From where does a President get such authority?

Since World War II, the proper authority to go to war has been ignored. It has been replaced by international entities like the United Nations and NATO, or the President, himself, while ignoring the Congress. And sadly, the people don't object.

Our recent Presidents explicitly maintain that the authority to go to war is not the U.S. Congress'. This has been the case since the 1950s, when we were first taken into war in Korea under a UN resolution and without congressional approval. Once again, we are about to engage in military action against Syria, and at the same time irresponsibly reactivating the Cold War with Russia. We're now engaged in a game of "chicken" with Russia, which presents a much greater threat to our security than does Syria.

Would we tolerate Russia in Mexico demanding a humanitarian solution to

the violence on the U.S.-Mexican border? We would consider that a legitimate concern for us. But for us to be engaged in Syria, where the Russians have a legal naval base, is equivalent to the Russians being in our backyard in Mexico.

We are hypocritical when we condemn Russia for protecting its neighborhood interests, as we claim we are doing the same ourselves thousands of miles from our shore. There's no benefit for us to be picking sides, secretly providing assistance and encouraging civil strife in an effort to effect regime change in Syria. Falsely charging the Russians with supplying military helicopters to Assad is an unnecessary provocation. Falsely blaming the Assad government for a so-called massacre perpetrated by a violent warring rebel faction is nothing more than war propaganda.

Most knowledgeable people now recognize that to plan war against Syria is merely the next step to take on the Iranian Government, something the neoconservatives openly admit. Controlling Iranian oil, just as we have done in Saudi Arabia and are attempting to do in Iraq, is the real goal of the neoconservatives who have been in charge of our foreign policy for the past couple of decades.

War is inevitable without a significant change in our foreign policy—and soon. Disagreements between our two political parties are minor.

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Both agree that sequestration of any war funds must be canceled. Neither side wants to abandon our aggressive and growing presence in the Middle East and South Asia.

This crisis building can easily get out of control and become a much bigger war than just another routine occupation and regime change that the American people have grown to accept or ignore.

It's time the United States tried a policy of diplomacy, seeking peace, trade, and friendship. We must abandon our military effort to promote and secure an American empire.

Besides, we're broke. We can't afford it. And worst of all, we're fulfilling the strategy laid out by Osama bin Laden, whose goal had always been to bog us down in the Middle East and bring on our bankruptcy here at home.

It's time to bring our troops home and establish a noninterventionist foreign policy, which is the only road to peace and prosperity.

This week I'm introducing legislation to prohibit the administration, absent a declaration of war by Congress, from supporting—directly or indirectly—any military or paramilitary operations in Syria. I hope my colleagues will join me in this effort.

#### MOURNING 2,000TH DEATH OF OPERATION ENDURING FREEDOM

The SPEAKER pro tempore. The Chair recognizes the gentleman from